

Southland Connect May 2010

Dear Friends,

Have you learnt to enjoy the change of seasons¹? We can each have our favourite time of year ('Bring on November' I say!) – but we know that our preferred time cannot be the only season of the year. And so we go through the calendar each year noting our likes and dislikes to those around us.

I sometimes wonder if our Heavenly Father tires of our fickleness. Our reactions to the seasons are but a small example. I think that we are fickle in much more serious things in life as well. A Bible passage that has kept reminding me of this is Romans 1:18-23. Paul describes how certain attributes of God are 'clearly seen' because He has made them known from 'what has been known'. This leaves us all without excuse about giving God the proper recognition as Creator of all things.

The description of fickleness comes in verse 23 – we swap saying thanks to God for the good things He has given us, and instead make them (the created things) the major focus of our devotion. I wonder if how we approach our teaching and leading falls into this category of, well, heresy...

We live in such a blessed age where we can learn so much about how to teach well, and the details of our subjects. But how easily do we marginalise the Creator in the process? Here are some examples of where God may be left behind in the self-sufficiency of our professionalism (these are but a cross section of ideas, without any thought of priority or level of significance):

1. Do our students and teachers see us model spiritual devotions well? For example, what encouragement is there to pray in and around the classrooms? What is the role of staff devotional times in the school?
2. Do our students learn how God's role as Creator is foundational in each subject they learn at school? (An interesting assessment of this would be to ask each year 12 student if they can describe one way that God is relevant to each subject they have studied in their final two years of school...)

¹ We could also reflect on the *educational seasons* – for example, how are the mid-year assessments going for you about now? We will look at this another time...

3. Do the final year students understand what the Bible is, what it is about, and its potential role in their ongoing life (personal and professional)?
4. Now for some subject specific ones – how many poetry teachers include some Psalms in their teaching programs? How many English teachers can point students to literature that has redemptive themes running deeply in its veins (novels such as Ben-Hur and Robinson Crusoe come to mind...)? Can the science teachers distinguish between the ‘why’ questions behind the purpose of science in contrast to the ‘what and how’ questions of the scientific method? If I asked the history (or music or art) students what a distinctly Christian approach to history (or music or art) was, could they tell me?
5. And of course, Colossians 1:15-17 would compel us to check how each of us could explain the role of Christ in the purpose of each of our disciplines...

May God grant us all the humility to know what we do not know, and the passion and commitment and courage to seek Him first in all that we teach and how we teach it.

Below is some ongoing news from us to you...

We trust that the news bits that we bring to you are helpful. If there are other things that you would like to know, please let us know.

Southland in Indonesia...

Do you remember to pray about our education programs being global in their impact? If not, then this story may encourage you in this.

Earlier this year I spent time working with colleagues who support the ministry of Christian schooling in Indonesia. The group is the Association of Christian Schools International, and the two leaders who invited me to Surabaya and Jakarta are Dr Janet Nason (South East Asian Regional Director) and Dr Ishak Wonohadidjojo (National Director). During the time together with two groups of school leaders, we worked to dream about cohorts of Indonesian brothers and sisters doing the Southland M Ed (Leadership) as a follow on from their ACSI leadership training.

And it has commenced. Rev Dr Ian O’Harae is at the time of writing in Indonesia introducing his unit “Leading and Managing: An integrated process”. Ian is a part-time lecturer within our faculty, as well as being a Baptist Pastor and an experienced senior school leader (he will be going back into a principal position later in the year).

These are indeed exciting times as God works through people in fellowship who desire to equip His people for ministry in its many and various forms. We thank God for the opportunity to be part of this good work.

National Leaders Conference in Canberra

I have just returned from this gathering of leaders in Christian schooling from across a number of the different Christian Education sectors. You will be able to obtain detailed updates about the conference from the Christian School Australia's website – but here are some highlights from me:

Bryan Cowling

Bryan gave one of the keynote addresses and gave these challenging points for further thought²:

1. *Some [almost] Imperceptible Educational Revolutions:*
 - a. Reduction in holistic teaching time [I will be writing more about this in future editions of *Connect*]
 - b. Normalisation of pragmatic utilitarianism [my brief explanation = the main driving force in educational reform is economic development]
 - c. Loss of relationship as a norm in teaching and learning; and an attendant increase in individualism
 - d. The [aggressive] New Atheism [if you want to know more about this, read Antony Flew's *There is a God – how the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind*, Collins 2007]
2. *Nine [or 10] Big Issues* for Christian educators to discuss and develop further:
 - a. Funding [a Federal review has been announced and was discussed in other sessions]
 - b. What is an *Australian approach* to Christian education?
 - c. How do we keep the relational, moral and faith aspects of curriculum alive?
 - d. Thus, how do we develop the integration of faith and learning in our schools?
 - e. How do we encourage more professional development that has as an emphasis theology and pedagogy [have you looked at our prospectus of late?]?
 - f. How do we equip the next generation of leaders in their understanding of applied theology [have you looked at our prospectus of late?]?

² Anything in square brackets [] is a commentary from me and not necessarily a summary of Bryan's thoughts

- g. How do we develop scholarship amongst researchers within Christian education?
- h. How can we encourage more Christians into teaching (in whatever schools)?
- i. How can we engage our theologians in focussing more on applied theology within our churches?
- j. Can we develop more unity as a sector in common ministry?

Be free to send in any ideas you have about these things that Bryan has raised, and we will float them here for further responses...

Three Policy Areas

The conference was briefed on three political policy areas that will engage our leadership into the future. They were the areas of the teaching of Creation within science, the employment of only Christians, and human rights. Below are some of my thoughts for your use, discussion or response:

A. Academic Freedom in All Disciplines

If education is to be deep and meaningful, then it will continue the tradition of the *Academy* in inviting students to explore the uniquely human questions of ultimate purpose and meaning in any discipline (to do less is to reduce teaching to instruction only). This enterprise will therefore, at times, take us to investigating the 'why' questions of the subject under consideration, whether based in the humanities or sciences. Such consideration of the deeper issues related to the topic of study will require discussion about the philosophy and theology of that discipline. Given that this is one of the strong reasons why parents make choices about which school to send their students to, on what basis would any government or their agency restrict which philosophies can and cannot be studied?

B. Employment of Christians

If our schools are to be places of Christian ministry, then they are to be places of people who are called under the Lordship of Christ to that work in that time and place. This Christian understanding of vocation is developed from the belief that anything Christians do in their everyday life is to be a presentation of thankful and living sacrifice, which is their logical act of worship (as per Romans 12:1 and Colossians 3:23). Therefore, any Christian school that has intentionally (and publically) established itself as a Christian learning community will be able to explain to any of its potential employees how this understanding of Christian ministry will be

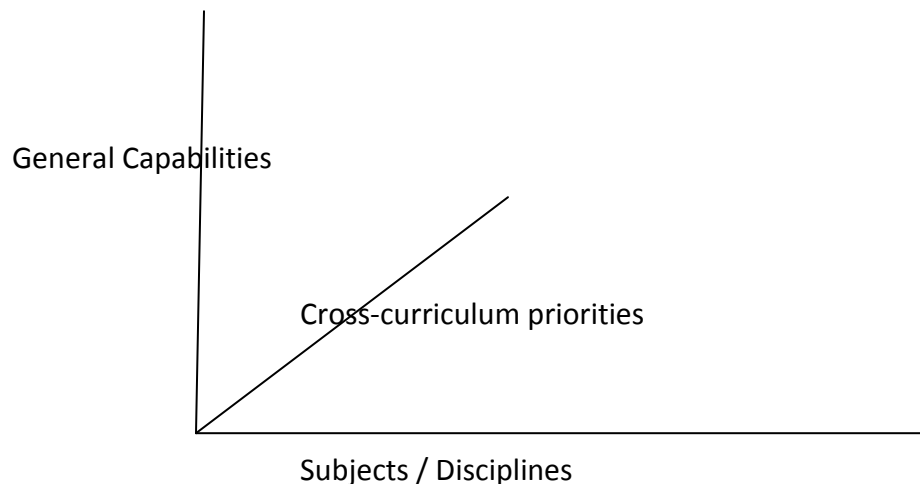
relevant to the commitment required of them if they want to become part of that educational community. This includes the theology of the Holy Spirit being the guide to any aspect of moral life (personal and public) in line with the teachings of the Bible.

C. Human Connectedness – the purpose of human rights and responsibilities

Victor Frankl noted that because of the human capacity to go to extremes in relational and civic life, the Statue of Liberty on the West Coast of the USA should be complemented by the Statue of Responsibility (sic) on the East Coast. We believe that any discussion of human rights is to have corollaries about responsibilities. The purpose of any articulation of human rights is, for Christian communities, to enable people to be free to practise their commitment and service to others under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christian communities frame their understanding of human rights in the language of justice and mercy. The discernment of the balance between these two at times competing relational dynamics is understood to be enabled by people who mutually and freely want to do any aspect of their work under the Lordship of Christ. This therefore is the framework upon which Christian communities will evaluate any general civic expression of human rights.

The National Curriculum

Professor Barry McGaw spent some time in briefing and describing the National Curriculum (remember – you can read, download and comment on the draft syllabi on the ACARA website). One very helpful framework that was given to us was the following three dimensional model that summarises the main streams within the National Curriculum:



The Grad Dip Ed continues to grow...

We are taking enrolments for the Grad Dip Ed (Secondary) and our Masters programs for semester 2 now. Please let your friends know about this.

We will also be taking *term 4 and summer intakes* for the Grad Dip Ed (secondary). So if someone you know is about to finish their primary degree and wants an early start to their teaching training, please let them know about these early start opportunities!

Also remember that all of our courses are now Fee Help approved.

A Connecting Question

In the last edition of *Southland Connect*, we asked some questions about a Christian understanding about uniform. Here is one attempt at explaining this:

Any Standard of Dress is designed to demonstrate relational sensitivity to those around us. Such sensitivity may be purely on cultural grounds, but is always with the deeper purpose in mind to not offend another for the sake of the Gospel of Christ (in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Thus, student uniform (or standard of dress if not in uniform) is designed to demonstrate a culturally appropriate expression of being in a disciplined learning environment, in accordance with the type of activity being undertaken. The adults in such a setting will demonstrate an even more mature expression of such self-discipline. Thus, ironically it seems, for the sake of the Gospel, and in the freedom of the Gospel, we may find ourselves wearing things (like ties) that are not an absolute in creating relational safety and care, but do tend to attract or repel those who may come into our ministry.

WHAT THINK YE?

A Research Thought... What Makes a Good Teacher?

Here is one (of many) descriptions of what some students think makes a teacher a good teacher:

Corbett and Wilson (2002) summarised the descriptions by 400 students of what makes a good teacher. The students noted that good teachers:

- 1. Made sure that students did their work;*
- 2. Were willing to help students whenever and however the students wanted help;*
- 3. Explained assignments and content clearly;*
- 4. Varied classroom routine;*
- 5. Took time to get to know the students and their circumstances; and*
- 6. Controlled the classroom.³*

A Devotional Thought...

Though I am free and am a slave to no-one, I make myself a slave to everyone. To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Corinthians 9:20 & 22)

Shalom,

Stephen

³ Corbett, D., & Wilson, B. (2002) What students say about good teaching. *Educational Leadership*, September, 18-22.